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**1961/09/13**

5/P 6/118-3 J.P. Chene  
 Report ref. 61761474 from Far East 9/19  
 9/20 10/11/61 Doc 5 SID 6056  
 CHINA 2-5/P S.C. X copy  
 S-S/P d... Burnday  
 4 CR sub B. 4/26/61  
 5 CR sub J.S.

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Authority NND 959001

By MB NARA Date 2/17/95

September 13, 1961

To: The Secretary R/t'd by Battle  
 Through: S/S chit 9/18 - status paper S/FE, 6)  
 From: S/P - George C. McGhee should be cleared with S/FE  
 Subject: Anticipatory Action Pending Chinese Communist  
 Demonstration of a Nuclear Capability

Problem:

To consider early action we might take to minimize the impact on US and free world security interests of a first Chinese Communist explosion of a nuclear device.

Discussion:

If Communist China could detonate a nuclear device as early as 1962, as has been estimated,\* we should consider now what actions should be taken in anticipation of the event, instead of later in reaction to it. The initial impact will be primarily psychological, with secondary political and military effects deriving from it. This establishes the psychological field as one deserving immediate attention.

It is submitted that Communist China is likely to get at least two types of psychological dividends from its explosion: (1) Many Asians are likely to raise their estimate of Communist China's present and future total military power relative to that of their own countries and the capabilities in the area of the US; and (2) they are

likely

\*According to one unagreed estimate it might even do so in 1961 (NIE 13-2-60).

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-2-

likely to see the accomplishment as vindicating claims that the Communist method of organizing a backward state's resources is demonstrably superior. Both reactions are likely to contribute to feelings that communism is the wave of the future and that Communist China is, or soon will become, too powerful to resist.

It will not be possible to prevent the accrual to Communist China of such dividends, but it may be possible by advance action to reduce them.

All things are comparative, and Communist China is compared first of all with the other countries of Asia. If another, but non-Communist Asian state detonated a nuclear device first, a subsequent and consequently a somewhat anticlimactic Chinese Communist explosion would not carry a comparable implication of Communist superiority, or make quite as much impact on those who fear China's growing power.

According to one estimate, India's atomic program is sufficiently advanced so that it could, not many months hence, have accumulated enough fissionable material to produce a nuclear explosion. While we would like to limit the number of nuclear powers, so long as we lack the capability to do so we ought to prefer that the first Asian one be India and not China.

Nehru was quoted as saying, upon his arrival in Belgrade August 31 and in the context of the Soviet decision to resume weapons tests, "I am against nuclear tests at any time in any place." The same day, an official spokesman in Delhi was quoted as making the less categorical statement: "We are against all tests and explosions of nuclear material except for peaceful purposes under controlled conditions." Given the context and taken together, these statements suggest that it would be difficult to get Nehru to agree to any proposal for an Indian nuclear test in the near future, and that the chances of its acceptance would depend upon the extent to which it met rather narrow criteria.

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Authority NND 957001  
By AB NARA Date 2/17/85  
TOP SECRET

-3-

Nevertheless Nehru might be brought to see the proposal as being in India's interests. If accepted and implemented, it should help forestall Communist China's using nuclear blackmail against India; reduce its ability to frighten neighbors of India whose security is important to that country; and minimize the usefulness to the Communist Party of India of a demonstrated Chinese nuclear capability which otherwise could be cited as evidence that communism, as practiced in China, is superior to India's mixed economy.

Preliminary exploration within the Department (with officers in FE, S/AE, NEA, BMA and DMR) has elicited concurrence with the idea, per se, that it would be desirable if a friendly Asian power beat Communist China to the punch, and it has turned up no likelier candidate than India.

But officers have raised a number of reservations and doubts besides those alluded to already: (1) India might require considerable technical assistance in order to explode a nuclear device before Communist China does; (2) there appear to be legal obstacles to the supplying of such assistance by either the British or ourselves; (3) we are not good at keeping such things covert, whereas the explosion could be expected to have utility only in proportion as it appeared to be an Indian accomplishment; (4) there probably would be considerable difficulty in finding a practical peaceful use for such an explosion, and fall-out from it would be open to the usual and valid objections, including ones related to the fears which could arise or be created among an ill-informed and partly superstitious populace; (5) alternately meeting the requirement of "controlled conditions" for an experimental explosion might present problems; (6) Pakistan could be expected to react most adversely to an Indian explosion which might

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TOP SECRET

Authority NND 957001 F  
By AB NARA Date 2/17/86

TOP SECRET

-4-

subsequently be exploited against it, and to be highly resentful of any outside instigation and assistance, known or surmised; and (7) an Indian explosion would provide the Chinese Communists basis for urging that the USSR increase its assistance to the Chinese Communist nuclear program.

The idea has also been discussed with Ambassador Galbraith, who is strongly opposed to any US approach to Nehru. He thinks the chances are roughly only one out of fifty that Nehru's reaction would not be the negative one that we are seeking India as an atomic ally. He sees the calculus of prospective benefit inherent in the one chance as outweighed by the harm implicit in the other forty-nine. He also thinks his British and Canadian colleagues would be unwilling to make such an approach to Nehru. Ambassador Galbraith recalled that Dr. Wiesner is expected soon to take a trip to Pakistan, when he might also visit India. He said, in this connection, that he would at most be willing that Dr. Wiesner, in the course of conversations with Dr. Bhabha, Chairman of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission, raise the matter of the prospective Chinese Communist nuclear explosion and ask what effect if any it will have on India's program in the atomic field. Presumably any further initiatives in the matter, if the idea germinated in Dr. Bhabha's mind and bore fruit, would have to come from the Government of India, when we could decide what the US response should be within the framework of something more concrete than we now have to work with. (Dr. Wiesner, incidentally, might now be able to resolve some of the technical and legal doubts raised in the foregoing discussion.)

While nothing else would have so much prophylactic value as a prior atomic explosion by a free-world Asian state, a covertly-conducted information program might achieve some effect in reducing the psychological impact of the first Chinese Communist nuclear explosion. Assuming as we do that the Chinese Communists are fully committed to

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TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

-5-

acquiring nuclear capabilities, publicity about their program probably would not have important effect on their determination or rate of progress. It might provide them with an argument with which to press their Soviet ally to give increased assistance, but this would seem unlikely to weigh heavily among the factors considered by the Soviets in determining where their own interests in the matter lay.

A covertly-mounted informational program might be used to make and drive home useful points of which the following are illustrative:

(a) India (and perhaps Japan) have nuclear-development programs sufficiently advanced so that they could by now have produced a nuclear explosion; their programs, however, have been directed rather at peaceful uses of atomic energy.

(b) Observers are puzzled by the failure of the Chinese Communists, who have been engaged in an effort which started in 1950, thus far to explode a nuclear device of their own. Since several other powers pioneered the way, the technological requirements for producing such an explosion have become widely known. Communist China has scientists, including ones trained abroad, of requisite capability; the essential raw materials; and suitable testing areas.

(c) It accordingly can only be speculated that Communist China (1) has organized its effort poorly, or (2) realizes that nuclear weapons are not ones which will contribute to realization of its expansive aims--since world opinion, which will condemn all aggression in proportion as it can be identified as such, will tolerate aggression with nuclear weapons even less than aggression by conventional armed forces.

Recommendations:

1. That you authorize appropriate officers in the Department to explore with other agencies and the

White House

TOP SECRET

Authority NND 959001

By CB NARA Date 2/17/95

TOP SECRET

-6-

White House representatives, who have expressed an interest in the general idea, the matter of Dr. Wiesner's sounding out Dr. Bhabha.

Approve CB

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

2. That, regardless of the decision on or outcome of (1), you approve in principle the proposal for covert dissemination in media throughout the Far East of suitable material designed to reduce the impact of an initial Chinese Communist nuclear explosion, authorizing FE and S/AE to explore it with CIA and to have it put into effect if exploration discloses that it would appear useful and feasible.

Approve CB

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

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FE - CONNAUGHEY

S/ME - Farley

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